

**Opening Statement of Chairman Hyde
Full Committee Hearing
“United States Policy Toward the Palestinians in the
Aftermath of Parliamentary Elections”**

**Thursday, March 2, 2006, 10:30 a.m.
2172 Rayburn House Office Building**

On January 25, 2006, Palestinians turned out in large numbers to elect a new Legislative Council. The unsettling result was a decisive win by Hamas, which had previously been declared a terrorist organization by the United States and which remains formally committed to the destruction of Israel.

There is no shortage of analyses offered to explain this upset. Many observers stress that the elections took place during a time of growing discontent among the Palestinian population across a range of issues, including widespread frustration with the Palestinian Authority for having made insufficient progress toward achieving statehood. In addition, the powers-that-be, most prominently the dominant Palestinian organization Fatah, were increasingly factionalized and commonly perceived as thoroughly corrupt.

Regardless of the reasons, and as disappointed as many are by the election results, the Palestinian people deserve recognition for having conducted what were arguably the freest and fairest democratic elections in the Arab world. As Secretary Rice stated in Davos last month, “The Palestinian people have apparently voted for change, but we believe that their aspirations for peace and a peaceful life remain unchanged.”

But the victory by Hamas has presented the United States with a dilemma. If Hamas remains committed to Israel’s destruction, it will be impossible for the Palestinian Authority to be a credible negotiating partner. But given that there is no candidate waiting to fill that role, the always-precarious search for some version of peace in the region cannot move forward.

The key question, then, is whether or not Hamas can be persuaded to change its rejection of Israel's right to exist and to accept that the fundamental interests of the Palestinian people can only be met, if not by peace, then by a working accommodation between the two sides.

What leverage do the United States, the Israelis, the Europeans, the moderate Arab leaders, and other members of the international community possess to assist this process?

The most obvious instrument is financial support. Over many decades, the United States has been generous in helping to meet the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people, with its donations amounting to nearly \$2 billion. But most of that assistance has been provided indirectly through the United Nations and other international organizations. We have given little direct aid to the Palestinian Authority itself, and that is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future.

Further, following Hamas' victory, the House and Senate agreed on a resolution stating that the United States should not give direct aid to the Authority as long as its legislature remains dominated by those who call for the destruction of Israel. But a cutoff of funding for humanitarian programs would have the effect of helping terrorist regimes like Syria and Iran expand their support among the Palestinian population.

Without question, continued assistance from the U.S. and other donors is essential to meeting basic human needs and avoiding a worsening of conditions in general. According to the World Bank, unemployment in the West Bank and Gaza is an astonishing 23 percent, but the real level may be as much as twice that amount. Forty-three percent of the population is living below the poverty line. Who can doubt that these are ingredients for continued instability and, ultimately, an explosion?

The Administration has informed our Committee that it is reviewing all forms of assistance to the Palestinians. I am certain our witnesses today will enlighten us on this

and other issues, including our discussions with the Israeli Government and others in the region and in the international community.

In the *Book of Isaiah* is found the oft-quoted phrase: “They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks, nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.” This vision has remained beyond reach ever since these words were written more than two millennia ago, and yet it remains an enduring element in our ambitions for the future.

But the world’s billions dream different dreams, and we cannot expect noble sentiments alone to conquer irreconcilable differences and end deadly struggles. Some problems have no identifiable solution. But the baser instincts of man can be pressed into service for ends beyond those of immediate contests. Self-interest can be harnessed to advance common goals, and even fiercely defended separations can become stable boundaries.

Even as we must confront reality on its unyielding terms, we must hope that others understand that the virtues of self-interest need not be narrowly confined. I hope that the leaders of Hamas will combine their new mandate with wisdom and compassion for their own people and avoid the exhilarating temptations of apocalyptic visions. For these can only add to the suffering, desolation, and hopelessness that have long reigned among their people for whom they have sought, and have now been given, inescapable responsibility.

Let me now yield to my friend, the Ranking Democratic Member, Mr. Lantos, for any opening remarks he may wish to make.